

April 27, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

When I was asked to write a letter of nomination for Dr. Verna Hart to be included in the American Printing House for the Blind Hall of Fame Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field, I instantly agreed. My memory of Dr. Hart brought both recognition of her many accomplishments and fond emotions for this legendary teacher. Dr. Hart's contributions spanned five decades and touched so many lives, as she served as a teacher, an administrator, a researcher, and an university professor.

I was a young practitioner when we first crossed paths at an International Preschool Seminar Meeting. Emotions return as I recall her kindness and encouragement to me personally. I was awed by the depth of her knowledge and her resounding commitment to children with disabilities and their families. Dr Hart was living history for services for learners with blindness/visual impairments, multiple disabilities, and deaf-blindness. I felt her nonnegotiable expectations for being accountable to every child and family we serve. She inspired, demanded, coached, and supported excellence. She was truly a **role model** then, now, and into perpetuity as her teachings still have deep relevance for the work we do today.

Dr. Hart is deserving of this recognition for her many contributions to teaching, service, scholarship, research, advocacy, mentorship, role modeling, and innovative practices. Her contributions have stood the test of time. In this letter, I will focus briefly on her scholarship, advocacy, role model status, and innovative practices. Others can attest further to her service, mentoring, and research in more detail, but suffice it to say, there is evidence of her accomplishments in each criterion for the Hall of Fame.

Her curriculum vitae provides many lessons in our history of special education. There are words on the pages that describe her degrees, certifications, positions, presentations, and research that we no longer use in our profession as we have evolved in how children and youth with disabilities are described. Words such as handicapped, crippled, educable mentally retarded, and trainable mentally retarded remind us just how far we have traveled. They also tell the story of the early pioneers who first carved the path, then built a solid road that countless children, families, and professionals benefit from today.

Dr. Hart's quest to support students with disabilities and their families is evident in her 12 educational certifications – describing a professional deeply committed to her own learning to best support first children with disabilities as their teacher and then through the success of her university students. This depth of understanding across categories of disability melded into the understanding that when a child has more than one condition that impacts learning, knowledge across all areas of challenge to inform educational strategies that effectively address the interactive impact of multiple disabilities.

Her work experience began in 1950 where she initiated a special education program in St. Joseph, Michigan. Over the course of her first 15 professional years, she contributed as a teacher across varied populations of students with disabilities, served as an administrator, and **initiated new programs** in the area of special education and speech language pathology. Upon earning her doctorate, Dr. Hart began

work as an assistant professor at George Peabody College. Notably, she was also the Director of the Deaf-Blind Evaluation and Treatment Center, the Coordinator for Programs for Multiple Handicaps, and the Program for Deaf Education, and the Director of the Institute on Education of Deaf, Blind, and Multiple Handicaps. This work covered a five-year period of enormous responsibility and **opportunity to contribute to the literature and field practice** for students with sensory disabilities and a strong focus on those with deaf-blindness and additional disabilities. Her CV further attests to **innovation as new programs were developed** under her leadership that included a beginning educational program in a non-ambulatory ward of a hospital and a deaf-blind evaluation and treatment center. Her university work included a **groundbreaking federally funded program** to train personnel to work with infants with multiple disabilities.

Her journal articles and position papers illustrate a **passionate and research-informed advocate** for children with multiple disabilities. Dr. Hart challenged university preparation programs to accept the responsibility of training personnel to wholly understand the complexities and multiplicative effects of blindness and intellectual disability and to train teachers accordingly (Hart, 1969). She championed the now-accepted notion of teaching, not by dissection of the child through a restrictive discipline role, but the necessity to fully address the needs of the whole child. Over the subsequent years, our training programs have responded to the increasing number and complexity of concomitant challenges of children and youth with blindness/visual impairment and deaf-blindness.

In a 1980 paper addressing the birthday of Helen Keller, she once again reminded the field of the need to provide a goal-based, high-quality education to children with multiple disabilities. She noted, “Only by examining our successes, as well as our failures, can we really determine just exactly how the education of other children might differ.” She offered 10 rights of children with multiple disabilities that should not be ignored. These rights remain relevant today with broad concepts of **advocacy of early intervention, parent education and support, well planned lessons, deliberate changes in materials and experiences to support interest and the generalization of concepts, expectations and support for independence, high expectations real life behavioral consequences, and well trained personnel**. As I reread this article in preparation for this letter, I found myself nodding my head and silently cheering her on with this important and timeless message. The words resonate still today. We hear you, Dr. Hart, your message is loud and clear – we have more work to do and we must do it well!

In 1984, we see her continued **scholarly contributions and advocacy** again as she stressed the importance of researched-based assessment and curricula for infants and toddlers with blindness/visual impairment, again detailing the value of a cross-disciplinary approach. Dr. Hart continued her passion for accurate assessment tools for infants and toddlers with articles specific to the *Infant Mullen Scales of Early Learning* (1991a and 1991b). In the second edition of the *2002 Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming for Infants and Toddlers*, a widely used tool in early intervention, there was attribution for the shared development of this tool with Dr. Hart, who was a member of a federally funded consortium that investigated assessment practices with young children.

As a Co-Director of a federally funded project for children and youth with deaf-blindness, I am grateful for her early contributions in the fields of deaf-blindness and severe disabilities. She was a **founding member** in 1974 of the American Association of the Severely/ Profoundly Handicapped (AAESPH), now known simply as TASH. Her work with this organization was vital to the recognition that children with blindness/visual impairment could have significant disabilities and that children with significant

disabilities could have blindness/visual impairment. This may seem duplicative, but it was and still is an essential construct for personnel working in two very different fields.

There is so much more to be said and valued about the many contributions of Dr. Verna Hart. We can look back and point to her contributions that championed improved identification, assessment, and programming for children with blindness and deaf-blindness beginning in the early years and especially for those who had additional disabilities. She was a force for good and the bedrock of countless educational tenets that hold true today.

While our descriptive language for students with disabilities has evolved from the early days when Dr. Hart was getting started in the field of special education, we still rely on the concepts she initiated, embraced, and/or advanced. It is right that she be acknowledged as a true leader and an absolute legend in the Blindness Field.

This last accomplishment of her career, to be included in the APH Hall of Fame, will solidify this important message: "We still hear you, Dr. Hart. We are still learning from you. Your message is loud and clear. Your voice still rings true in our continued advocacy, commitment, and practices to do better for all students with disabilities and, especially those so vulnerable in infancy and across the years with the presence of additional disabilities."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Tanni L. Anthony". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tanni" being more prominent and the last name "Anthony" following in a similar style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Tanni L. Anthony, Ph.D
State Consultant on Blindness/Visual Impairment